

been holding the Crees, when Pershing went on foot through the whole camp of crying women and wailing babies and sullen braves, patient as paint while he tried to sort out the pandemonium. In the hubbub none of the soldiers noticed one of the Cree men, said to be wanted for something in Canada, emerge from his tent with a rifle, sit down, pull the barrel end to himself, and jam his big toe against the trigger. Blooey, and the slug tore on through him and just missed Pershing about a dozen feet behind him. When Mose and his men came rushing over, the lieutenant said as if to himself, "*That very nearly canceled out West Point.*"

Mose laughed harshly at the memory. It took a fairly hard hide to shrug off a close call like that. Pershing was not an easy one to figure, but he seemed inclined to give a man room to operate, and that was all Mose ever asked.

As the sergeant topped the ridge now, the first sight that met him was the snowcapped line of the Rockies, on a march of their own, extending on and on into what had to be Canada. He pulled up and simply stared. By damn, you could see from here to Judgment Day in this bench country. With a practiced eye he studied the lay of the land, the swales of grass in the creek basin to the west and the dark droplets that had to be cattle, no more buffalo in these parts. He spotted the provisioner's supply wagons down ahead there where a road led off to

ranch buildings quite a ways in the distance; a place with some real size from the looks of it. The saddlehorses and little cluster of people by the wagons must mean the cattleman and the provisioner were in the midst of dickering over the price for slaughter-beef. What he had to put his main attention to, however, was the thick ribbon of willows and cottonwoods that wound out of the ranch and across the prairie ahead. *Another damned one of those already*, a grimace coming with the thought. At each of these creek crossings, Indians who had been taking prairie squats all their natural lives suddenly were overcome with the need to go modestly in the brush. *And when they go, they keep on going*, the grim humor of it did little to lighten Mose's disposition where brushy creeks were involved.

He put his pony into a nice prancy trot as he headed down to the wagons. Never hurt to show people like these that a real rider was heading their way. When he reined up in front of them, the provisioner paid him all the attention he could have asked for, and as far as that went, so did the blocky man wearing specs who stood next to the provisioner, and the pair of highly interested boys next to the man they resembled down to their well-made boots. Mose noticed the older one, maybe eleven, watching him more gravely than the grownups were,

while the younger brother simply looked like he was itching to get his hands on Mose's horse. The little misters of that ranch, he would have bet his month's pay.

Greetings were exchanged, and to Mose's total surprise here came a white mitt of a hand up to shake his. "How do, sergeant," the voice that arrived with it was as chesty as the rest of the cattleman, "I'm Warren Williamson. It's a pleasure to see a man who knows how to sit on a horse. I wish more of my lazy crew did. Phil Sheridan always drilled it into my old outfit--put some spiff into your riding even when you're only on review to yourself." He indicated to the youngsters hanging back, trying to stay out of adult range but not miss anything. "These are my boys, Wes and Whit--I only get a crack at them when they're not in boarding school, but they're picking up on their riding. They know they'd better."

Mose guardedly took in the unexpected conversationalist down there by his stirrups. Every once in a while he came across a white man of this sort, a little better disposed toward him than most because they had both straddled a cavalry saddle. Williamson's eyeglasses rode high on one ear, maybe giving him a cockeyed view of the world. On the other hand, ^{+ man} he evidently owned this spread where cattle were grazing halfway to the horizon, and that must have taken some

The man

fairly clever sighting in on. Forthcoming as the man was, Mose figured there was no harm in a bit of conversation.

"I have me one of my own," he nodded in the direction of the boys, "little stinker back at the post. Keep a fellow hopping, don't they." He gave the young gentlemen a solemn salute, his dark brows mischievously pulled down in a parade-ground glower; then provided a broad smile to lighten things back up. The younger one grinned back, the older one still studied him.

"That lieutenant of yours," the provisioner was heard from now, "is he gonna march these right on up through Blackfeet country or take the branch over to the Whoop-up Trail to keep from mixing Indians with Indians? Makes a couple days' difference in figuring out how much beef Mister Williamson here gets to hold me up for."

Rather needlessly, it seemed to Mose, he had to admit that the commanding officer did not spell out his every intention to him. The provisioner nodded in disgust as if he'd expected that, and ^{muttered that} ~~said~~ he'd better find out the lieutenant's thinking for himself. "I'll try talk him into the long way. Help out my wallet and yours too, Mister Williamson, if we can put that much more beef into these so-called wards of the government."

muttered that

repeated

"I don't care about that," the ranch owner ~~said~~, ice in his voice all of a sudden. Both boys went quite still. "Just so the cavalry operates the way it's supposed to and clears them out of this country so they don't get to build their shacks and pony corrals in every damn coulee any more. Good riddance." There was a great deal more boss in his gaze than there had been when he looked over at Mose now. "Sergeant, how long before the column will be at the creek crossing?"

"Close onto noon, I'd say, sir"--it never hurt to add that, Mose had found, even to a civilian.

"Gives me time to get these boys home and working on their suitcases for stagecoach time," *the rancher said crisply* "don't pull such a long face, Whit, the rest of us didn't rate any Easter break." The men laughed at that. "I'll fetch up with you there at the creek," Williamson told the provisioner, simultaneously nodding an offhand goodbye in Mose's direction. "Wouldn't miss seeing this parade."

"Sergeant! I want that man's name!"

Bovard. Mose knew it before he could even swing around in his saddle and put the best face on the situation for the lieutenant. He and several half-

repeated

*"... rancher
said
decisively.
don't*

drenched troopers were trying to use lariats to tow out a grievously overloaded wagon which had bogged in the axle-deep water, and he had posted Bovard on the south bank meanwhile to push the Crees farther downstream where the creek crossing wasn't so jammed up; that should have been simple enough. But Mose had to look twice to even spot the beset young trooper in the mess of people and Indian ponies and what-all crammed on the bank now. Amid it all, Cree women and kids and apparently even their dogs were setting up a fuss about not being allowed to take a squat in the bushes. Mose swore under his breath. Either in spite of Bovard or because of him, the whole procession had tangled to a halt there next to the brush. And here came Pershing like his stirrups were on fire.

The lieutenant's shout had come from the far bank where the beef dickering was still going on, but to Mose's dismay the officer and his horse were amphibious now, Pershing parting the water in uncaring sprays in order to corner him there in mid-stream. "Have you gone blind, sergeant? They're taking to the brush again. After them."

Mose was burning with indignation that this had to happen here, in front of that rancher and the provisioner and the rest of the troop and for matter the damnable Indians. "Yes, sir, right away. I'll detach Brailey and send him--"

“By now you ought to know an order when you hear one, sergeant. Am I going to have to put you on report along with that fool trooper of yours? Gather up that squad and chase those runaways down yourself, grasp that? I want the point made to these Indians they can’t just take to the brush and expect to get away with it.”

“Yes, sir. We’ll fetch them, sir.”

Strenuously ordering his other soldiers to take up the slack at the creek crossing, Pershing watched the sergeant and the corporal and seven troopers, dark as shadows under their jaunty hats, peel away from the column and fan out west along the creek. The sergeant was jawing hard at them, he was glad to see. Old stripers like Rathbun could grow lackadaisical because of those comfortable chevrons, and that’s why you had to light a fire under them every so often. By now the lieutenant knew that this particular one was not averse to fiddling with a duty roster or a supply consignment if there was a bit of side money to be made from it, but he also had been a decorated platoon leader piling into the Comanches on the Rio Grande before John J. Pershing was even a plebe at West Point. Skin or otherwise, the lieutenant had nothing against Rathbun and nothing for him: it was

merely a matter of rank. All he cared was that the man made sure to do his job on horseback.

The Crees did not have much head start, Mose was sure, but in the brushy bottomland it did not take much. He was mightily upset at the turn things were taking. All of a sudden even the time of year was against him, the cottonwoods and willows leafed out fully so that he and his men could hardly see an inch into the thicket.

He deployed Brailey and half the squad to the opposite side of the creek, and took the rest to scour the near side. Everybody assiduously crashed through the brush. Even so, it must have taken an hour before a shout came from Brailey's direction. Mose and his troopers fought through the brush toward there and waded their horses up to a muddy patch of bank near where the Crees had been found hiding. *Damnation*, he thought as soon he saw them. Only a woman and two children. *This all we're ^{gonna} going to have to show for it?* He shook his head, letting his troopers know what he thought of their ability at pursuit.

"This don't sit right. Where's the mister?"

gonna

"These are all we seen any sign of," Brailey managed to protest and sound subdued at the same time. He pointed down at the batch of hoofmarks in the mud along the creekbank. "Tracks are a hellish mess, can't make anything of those. Could all be theirs, Sergeant."

"Or could be the man of the bunch rode into the water here." Mose on his horse pushed in close to the Cree woman on hers. "Your husband. Your man. Where is he?"

"No man."

"Like hell." Mose had been through something like this before, the Crees making a sort of game of it: the man sneaking back to camp later to create a commotion by spooking the horse herd and spiriting his family away again. He spun around to the squad. "Brailey, you and Squint and Roscoe take these back. Bovard, you're coming with me. The rest of you, start sifting through this brush. Two on each side of the creek and what I mean, give that brush a looking. He's in there somewhere."

Mose applied the spurs to his horse and headed up onto the nearest rise to where he could ~~see~~ ^{take in} more of the creek, ^{line} ~~ahead~~ ^{ahead} Bovard barely managing to keep up. From the height of the benchland, Noon Creek could be seen winding into the foothills a

ahead
^

few miles off, jackpines joining brush there for the Indian to hide in, and between here and there beaver dams complicated nearly every course of search along the creek channel. Not too far ahead, though, there was an oxbow bend, and a wide-open stretch of water beyond that. Mose somehow knew. "C'mon, knothed," he growled to Bovard, "he's holed up in that clump by the bend."

The Cree had seen them coming. He sat motionless on his pony until the two soldiers forged through the willows to the stand of cottonwoods that grew large in the bow of the bend. Then, looking straight at them, he swung off his horse in a tired way and went over and sat ^{crumpled} by the trunk of the biggest tree.

The sergeant and the private stared. Maybe the Indian was played out, maybe he had given up on it all, maybe a whole hell of a lot of things, but it was plain they would have to handle the man like a side of beef, truss him up and sling him on his horse, to get him back to the line of march. Glaring at him sitting ^{planted} there, Mose had the awful supposition that he had more than likely rounded up this particular Indian three or four times before, and if the Indian was ^{eventually} sick of it, he was too. He did not even think about what he did next. He slid his carbine from his saddle scabbard, drew down on the Cree, and shot him in the center of the chest.

crumpled?

planted

eventually

Bovard surprised Mose by having the presence of mind to grab the reins of the Indian pony while the sound of the single shot still echoed off. The horse would have to go back with them as proof to show to Black Jack. Not necessarily the deceased over there, though, Mose decided in a hurry. He wasn't about to ride back into several hundred Indians, even Indians as whipped as these, leading a horse with a dead brave draped across it. *Be just my luck he's some kind of Indian Jesus.*

He started instructing Bovard. "Let's tuck him under the brush back of that beaver dam, best we can do." He had no doubt that Bovard, already in enough trouble, could be made to go blind and dumb about this. He knew how to handle it with Pershing, too. *"Must 've been another one of those wanted ones, lieutenant. Took care of himself, same way as that one pulled the trigger in front of you, sir."* And that would be that.

By the second month after Mose mustered out, there were times when Angeline sang as if wondering to high heaven where he had vanished off to now.

"Sometimes I feel like a feather in the air,

A long ways from home."

Standing there ironing her way through the summer--taffeta floated to the top of the officers' wives' laundry this hot time of year--she wondered how long she dared let this go on, a husband jangling loose in the world. At first Mose had crowed about being quit of the cavalry and its stand-to reviews on perfectly fine mornings for going grouse hunting. It did not take long, however, before he was under the steady inspection of her eyes. Without saying much, she added him to the rest of her chores, let him roughhouse with Montgomery probably more than was good for either of them, tried to make allowances for the fact that he still seemed more at home with his horse than his family. She could tell he had not liked the move to servants' quarters here in back of the hospital, not that she could see it was any step down from married men's quarters over by the barracks; quieter here. She was much relieved when he latched on with the fort's horse contractor as a wrangler. But being bossed in the breaking corral by men he had once been over did not sit well. Angeline had real cause to fret when he tossed over that job and began to spend a good deal of time at the roadhouse, a mile from the fort and handy to the thirsts and other wants of the cavalrymen. Doing odd jobs there, he described it as. She did not want to hear how odd.

"Sometimes I think I'm neither
here nor there,
a long ways from home."

2 effs of
10/5

Switching a cooled iron for a heated one, by habit she used the brief trip to the stove to peek in on Montgomery in the next room where he was absorbed with his little zoo of tin toys. *When Papa coming home?* the boy kept pestering her with and she didn't have the heart to scold the question out of him. Lord knew, she asked herself it a hundred times a day. Ever since he took his discharge, Mose did not let her in on his thinking, just as he wouldn't say scat about that whole long last march to pitch those Crees back into Canada.

Something about that bothered at her. All his other times in the field, he came home with stories that wouldn't quit. Now it would take an advanced mind-reader to get anything out of him. Off in hunt of work, was as much as he told her this time when he saddled up, tickled Montgomery into a frenzy, kissed her that way, then rode around the back of the stables before heading out the west gate of the fort. That had been a week ago. She'd had an uneasy feeling, watching him avoid the road along the parade ground and past the barracks where any of Troop D might have been encountered.

"Papa!"

Angeline nearly dropped her flat-iron in startlement as Montgomery flung past her knees and sent the screendoor whamming open. "Papa, what that?!"

How Mose could ride a horse up to a house that quietly she never would understand, but here he was, practically on the front stoop, down out of the stirrups and unkinking himself by the time she could rush to the doorway. Montgomery had bounced to a halt and was turning into a solid fidget of excitement as he gazed up at his father.

"There's my Monty-tana!" came Mose's parade-ground boom. "C'mere, son. Brought you a persuader." He knelt and outfitted Montgomery with the miniature horse-hair quirt. "Put the loop over your wrist, then hold it, so. Now you can give your stick pony what-for, make him go as fast as you want. Off you go."

As the boy cantered away, quirt whizzing, Mose rose to his feet and swatted dust off himself as if in Angeline's honor, standing there akimbo the fresh way he did when he first came courting her. He all but had canary feathers on his lips, she saw.

"Found us work, Angel. Over in the Two Medicine country. Working for somebody rich. Goodbye, Fort Ass-in-a-bone."

"Hush with that!" She looked past him for little ears, but Montgomery was busy rampaging in and out among the clotheslines in search of further air to

be whipped. Besides, this was no time to let herself be scandalized, an improved mood around here was worth taking any amount of her husband's teasing. She smiled her best and said gently: "Mose, that's good, about the work. But you look done in. You need food?"

"I could handle some."

"It'll be ready by the time you put your horse up."

Hotcakes and sidepork, his favorite any time of day, sizzled on the griddle when he came slamming back into the house. He slapped Angeline on the hip and sat down to address himself to the food. Angeline served it up, then watchfully moved over to her mountain of ironing. She had to figure he would tell her the rest of it in his own good time, whatever calendar that was.

He ate and ate, still saying nothing, sitting there in something like a state of daze, as if the success of his journey was just now catching up with him. By damn, it had worked. You could never tell whether a white man would even look at you sideways, second time around. Mose had stood on the porch of the big ranch house waiting with his still respectable campaign hat swatting nervously against the leg of his best civilian pants. Then all at once Warren Williamson

practically came flying out the door, over to him in a second and appearing monumentally annoyed at having been summoned to deal with this kind of caller.

"If you're looking for a meal, you ought to know enough to come around back and the cook will--" Something about Mose registered then, maybe the hat. *"You're that sergeant."* Just that fast, Williamson's expression went from clouded to amused and suggestive. *"Not still looking for that runaway Cree, are you? I believe I saw you and your private come back without him, just his horse."*

"That one?" Mose had come three days' ride to take this chance. *"Just between us, sir, he got cured of that with a lead pill."*

"I figured he did." Now the ranch owner looked at Mose man-to-man, and any hesitation in him didn't last much longer than a couple of heartbeats. *"I'll tell you what. If you're on the grubline now, I could maybe use a man who knows what he's doing on horseback."*

Just like that. It still confounded Mose: you just never knew how things would work out. There on that porch he'd had his good piece of paper ready in his shirt pocket, but Warren Williamson never even asked whether he was discharged or had deserted.

Angeline realized she was swiping back and forth across the piece of clothing in front of her with a cold iron. She drew a breath and took the plunge:

“Mose? Two Medicine, you say? Isn’t that over by where you threw those Crees across the line?”

“General vicinity, is all. I’ll be riding for a big ranch, Angel. Be herding cattle instead of Crees.”

Nose against the screen door, Monty peered in at the grownups, impatient with their talking and eating. He could not wait any longer for the best thing about his father coming home, the moment when he would be grabbed up in those big arms like he didn’t weigh anything at all and tossed in the air, way up by the ceiling, and caught and tossed over and over again--he knew it scared Momma, and for that matter it sort of scared him, but it was a treat from his father, catching him up like that. He slipped past the screen door into the kitchen where they were, and when the two of them looked around at him, he raced headlong before Momma could stop him. “Papa! Papa! Make me fall up!”

Uptown and Down

1925

As usual by this hour of morning, Monty was out onto the street for the third time.

Habit stirred him awake early to do the chores even here, two-thirds of the continent away from the Double W, and even though the nature of the doing had changed beyond recognition. His first excursion, embarked on while it was still too soon to tell what the pinch of sky between the rooflines held for the day, always was around the corner and a few blocks over to the public school and its playground space out back, where he cinched up the roadwork shoes and ran to keep his breath built. At that hour only a few of the more fly types--Harlem never

seemed to have any shortage whatsoever of types--out early or in late on activities

that did not bear inquiring about were around to levy looks at the heavy-

shouldered man, long way from a kid, bounding across the skip-rope scuffs. By

now even these denizens of dawn knew who he was, and he never felt any more

at risk than, say, trying to cross Lenox Avenue when taxicabs were bearing

down. Back to the apartment for a wash-up after that, then gratefully to his big

feed of the day, breakfast. He took his meals by the month at the E & B, the

and Beal's 24 ~~twenty-four-hour Ever-open~~ Buffet beneath the elevated railway stop; the Eat 'Em

and Beat 'Em, if you could put away enough grub in the course of thirty days,

and he had brought his appetite with him from the ranch. Ham and eggs and

unlimited cornbread to set him up for the day, quite the life, ^{if he did say so himself.} Steak and eggs, for

two bits more, on concert days like yesterday.

He was getting his teeth into New York life in other ways, too. Each day

he felt a little less like some sort of permanent tourist as he strode through the

well-heeled neighborhood called Strivers Row about now. The ^{tree-lined} street brimmed

with morning-faced people by this hour. Harlem, he was finding, operated as if

every little while some signal was given to open a floodgate and it became the turn

of this ten thousand or that to pile out to go to work, to school, to church, to

cut

- Earl's Beal's
24-Hour
Buffet -

nightlife, to wherever there was maybe another rung on the climb from dun beginnings. Every one of those street-set faces, the astonishment still struck him as soon as he hit the sidewalk, somewhere on the same prism of color as his. Oh, there were white countenances even here--harness-bull cops on the beat and bowtied owners of stores and theaters, mostly--but hardly any in comparison; white raisins in the dark plum cake, all they amounted to here.

He thought about this at some level even when he was thinking about anything else. Sometimes after breakfast he would linger on his counter stool just to watch through the big cafe-front window the start of the morning rush, the domestics and elevator men and streetcleaners and dishwashers and myriad other doers of chores pouring into the L station in order to be on the job downtown when the white world there cranked open for business, and he could not help but marvel at the way things had swung his way. Last year at this time he had been in their shoes, even if his came with cowboy bootheels and milk-cow manure on them; and the goddamn Klan trying to cut his tracks, besides. Now he put on a suit every day of his life, and the fanciest of black cloth to perform in at night, and was it any wonder he felt far enough up in the world to tingle when he took his morning constitutional along Strivers Row and beyond?

Still, there was something more that kept trying to register in him on this particular outing. *Feels like the day it'll hit*, the rhythm of the notion came to him as steadily as his stride. *Feels like the odds are saying to hell with themselves today*. He realized he of course did not have a whit of fact to back that up--luck doesn't let you know beforehand that it is about to change, like the more generous weather--but the impression tingled too much to ignore. It was somewhat like the jangle that went through him back there on the boat at the Gates of the Mountains, that incredible first day. He clenched one hand, just from nerves, as he navigated from one block of toney addresses to the next. His mind played with the idea that maybe there was such a thing as odds mounting up to the point where they vibrated like bees in a hive, sending something off into the air. In any case, he could not shake off the feeling of good fortune about to alight and start tickling him silly, did not want to even try to shrug that away; he had too many years of his life invested in ^{finally} reaching the vicinity of luck.

But maybe it was just the atmosphere. Strivers Row, after all, knew its stuff about prosperity. This later crowd stepped smartly into the day according to Harlem's own clock rather than downtown New York's, and while Monty had ^{carried} clued in that this given neighborhood had a justifiable reputation for being

more
intense?
why's a thing
like this come
from
in. done

Ⓟ

carried

snooty--it was swankily confident enough to joke of itself as being the home of America's leading second-class citizens--the evidence of the eyes was that this particular canyon of brownstones was indeed Harlem's hit-it-rich gulch, where the shared color was of a different luster than gold but at this time and place panning out just as nicely. He sipped at the spectacle every step of his route. Well-dressed men so dark of face that they made him look like a moonlight shadow nodded a respectful good morning to him and forged off to put fillings in people's mouths or plead their cases for them or align their voting habits. Kids dressed as spotless as little royalty flashed down tall sets of steps from the rowhouses and bounced one another in the general direction of their schoolday. Now and again a boy spilling over with mischief would skip in behind him and walk the cowboy way Monty did, toed in and just enough bowlegged to suggest horseback heroics, until the mother on sentry at a window called down in a well-modulated voice not to be pestering Mister Rathbun like that, hear? Monty knew better than to grow spoiled by such circumstances, but it gratified him every time to walk along here as recognized as a man chalked down the back.

His mind on all this and as always somewhat on tonight's music as well, he nonetheless grew leery as he approached the corner where the fancy stoops

gave out and opportune storefronts suddenly lined up like they were clothespegged to the second-floor windows. Strivers Row could be as grand as it wanted, but the enterprises beyond were as forthright as a trapline. Even the fruit stands posted prices that seemed to want argument--the elocution-schooled wives from the rowhouses would be along to do their shopping any minute now, primed for debate--and somewhere on any block an apartment-room church with Eureka or Oasis in its name waited to reel in your soul and take it to heaven or Africa, and within a bottle's throw of those were cabaret speakeasies aswim with bootleggers, con men, cardsharps, touts of this or that, women with their hooks out, and other manner of lowlife ready, he well knew, to drain off what his singing was bringing in.

Making sure to sharpen up his eyes, the way he used to start watching out for the Loomises as soon as he lit onto Clore Street, he arrowed ahead past all the diversions. Bobbed his usual greetings to the strategic scatter of ~~crippled~~ beggars, and by common consent--they recognized, under the suit, another workingman--nothing more. Tut-tutted sympathetically to a well-rehearsed hard-luck story from a newcomer newer than he and kept on the move. Even the accents of the blandishments were tricky here, the gumbo lingo of the cottonbacks up from the

crippled

South and the lullaby intonations of the Caribs and the rounded declamations from the diction wallopers who might be genuine street preachers and might be something else entirely. ^{*This Plunge of Harlem*} ~~It~~ struck him as remarkable in its way as Strivers Row, ^{*with its*} ~~the~~ absolute necessity to keep your wits about you along here or there were just all kinds of pockets they could fly off into. Fortunately, within a couple of blocks his daily destination poked up like a smudged thumb out of all this concerted grasping, the newsstand where the ink of headlines practically obliterated the gray-napped proprietor within.

Exchanging greetings, Monty shopped the array of front pages the newsstand was wreathed in until he spotted the particular one he wanted today. The *World*; that ought to be ample enough. He handed the vendor the pennies for the newspaper, then a paper dollar for the number he wanted to play. "Three-oh-six again, how about."

"Straight or combination?"

"Straight again."

"A man can strop a razor on what you pick, Mister Rathbun." He jotted the number and Monty's bet on the cheatsheet, then handed him his slip of paper.

"How'd it go last night?"

*some Plunge
of Harlem
with its*

"I'm about to find out."

Over & over he had told himself he shouldn't still be, but

Back in his apartment, though, he took his time about that. He was still smarting from Boston, where he'd had a cold and his performance suffered accordingly. Some of the reviews there worked him over practically down to his shoeshine. *The crickets*, J.J., his manager, pooh-poohed the critics; *You leave the crickets to me*. Good sound logical advice, as far as Monty was concerned, just impossible to follow. A person was always going to be curious about what was written about him; half the people he'd met in New York lived on that precise curiosity.

But he didn't have to let it smack him in the face this very moment. He looked around the apartment at all the puttering to be done—city living seemed to take an unbelievable amount of puttering. Did his voice exercises before anything else. *Make that such a habit you'll feel absolutely undressed without it*, one of

those precepts cross-stitched into him back at the North Fork and the Fort

Assiniboine auditorium by you-know-who. Straightened up his *some mindful* Made the bed, even did a little *wary in the vicinity of radiator & doorbushes where spark shocks lurked when a person lived on carpets all the time.* dusting. Then remembered it was rent day, and the tab at the E&B had to be covered too, and his walking-around money needed an infusion as well.

Humming, he dug out his bankbook, sneaked a look, and gave the kind of whistle

Over & over he told himself he shouldn't still be,

Boston
last week

Montgomery.

1

went thru motions of some dusting.

electrical shock from walking on carpet while dusting

he had been waiting a lifetime to give when holding his financial worth in his hand. How it did add up, each whopper of a deposit after one of the big performances, and even the smaller steady take from the Saturday morning jumps, held at the Plaza Hotel and the Barbizon and those places. Cecil tickling the piano, him putting forth maybe half a dozen songs, eight tops. All due respect to the Double W and life as the Rathbuns previous to him had known it, but this beat looking at wet sheets on a clothesline or the back ends of cows.

Contentedly
 Stashing the bankbook away, he came across yesterday's number slip in the dresser drawer, under his socks. He wadded it into a tiny ball and put today's in its place. To tell the truth, he would not be surprised if the number never did hit. But it was the luxury he allowed himself, a dollar a day to play the numbers; as much as his month's wages had been on the ranch, and here he didn't even miss it. Other than that buck-a-day bet, he had himself staying so tight to the straight and narrow he could have taught rope-walking. *If I don't know by now not to blow it all in, how many hard knocks does it take?*

Still holding off on the newspaper, he could not help glancing toward it, its masthead *New York World* expectant on the table. Quite the world, all right. Last night he had walked onto the stage in front of a packed audience of twelve

contentedly

hundred, and tonight's would be no more than three dozen at best. Another musicale. The take wasn't great, but J.J. scheduled these with as much care as he did the big-hall recitals. People on the in; *sassiety*, J.J. called such gatherings.

Monty ^{he} always tried to picture the performance ahead--another of her prescriptions--and he went over the probable musicale scene ^{another of her prescriptions} now while insuring

^{pulling out to make sure they} that his song sheets were in the right order. A number of Strivers Row's own

movers and shakers always adorned the evening's chosen living-room, to be sure,

but right in there with them mingled the ^{pairfared} downtowners who came up here on the

lure of the music or their own highly honed curiosity or just because it was the

thing to do. The Rabiznaz, turnabout of the Zanzibar, he ^{couldn't help but think} thought of those as:

cluster of white folks who stuck out oppositely in Harlem like the dark-skinned

habitués in off Clore Street did there in Helena. Which was to say, reverse to the

overwhelming color around them, the way faces show odd in the negatives of a

photograph. Not that it bothered him--he had been mingling, to call it that, since

the day he and his parents entered the pearly kingdom of the Williamsons--and it

didn't visibly bother the Rabiznaz or the Harlemites, but he found it close quarters

compared to dealing with a stage audience. Close and elevated. Women who

were said to have diamond-studded garters (not that he had chanced onto such a

*Better
Transition.*

*neatly handled
pairfared*

phenomenon himself yet). Men with books to their names, or handed-down money they hadn't bothered to count yet. Conversation that circled as mercilessly as the rims of their gin glasses. "*Oh, there's Blanche and Alfred, I'll bet he's scouting.... Oh, look, the Sitwells are over from London. Did you hear Heywood say, 'They don't with me.'*" It helped that the Major sometimes was on hand, providing some force of gravity. At the last one of these even his wife was there, looking as if the presence of other people was a strain.

Couldn't count on seeing him there tonight, though, ^{it occurred to Monty,} given what time of year it was. ^{He} Monty thought a moment and rearranged the order of the night's songs, putting the Medicine Line one last so that he would have some guff about Montana and the Tenth Cavalry and so on to give out with when he had to make conversation afterward. He fondled the stack of songs as appreciatively as he had the bankbook. *Talk about luck, having these.* They couldn't have squired him along on this any better, them and the Major.

By the time the whirlwind of success on the radio stations out west had carried him all the way to the big job in Chicago, he'd known it was prudent to consult with higher authority about the step beyond that. The Major gave one of

My remembered,
the
to be on
his own

cap B

those smiles of his and said, *You need to get together with Phil Sherman.* The heart-hammering trip into New York, the session of the three of them in Phil's fashionably rundown office in the theater district. There barely had been time for Phil at the upright piano to rack the accompaniment sheets into place and attempt to follow him in a few of the songs, when there came the knock at the door. In walked the slenderest man Monty had ever seen, in a duck-foot strut. His complexion was dark honey and his suit was fashionable London brown, both accentuated by a carnation of nearly blinding whiteness in his lapel.

"Philip," he greeted Sherman, *"tell me you have a theater owner who still knows how to spell vaudeville and would give his left one to book Butterbeans and Susie for, oh, six weeks at scale."*

Who? still written on Wes's face and Which? similarly all over Monty's, they tried not to look like fish out of water as Phil Sherman, chuckling, steered the arrivee to them for handshakes. At Wes's name, the already taut man all but twanged with attention.

"The Major Williamson, do I gather? Philip here has been holding out on me. First Sergeant Jace Jackson, sir, 369th Infantry."

Sherman

"The Harlem Hellfighters." Wes looked instantly at ease and shook hands with him a second time. *"I never did understand why we wasted you by attaching you to the French. In the thick of it at the Argonne, your bunch?"*

"Us alongside the Senegalese," that was answered. *"A matched set, I presume the thinking was."* J.J. at last zeroed in on Monty, who had a hunch he had deliberately been left for last. *"And this is the talented gentleman you think I need to hear, Philip?"*

"The very one. Allow for my piano playing, okey-doke?"

"Before we start," J.J. stated. *One thing.* Up stood his index finger, illustrating the imperative. *"Could save us all some time."* He sent a warning gaze to each of them in turn. *"This isn't going to be jazz, is it?"* Or jass, as J.J. pronounced it with a wince. *"Because, no slur on our singing friend here, that is not a field I will have anything to do with. You can tell me as much as you want to that jazz is all the thing. But the ambience, gentlemen, the ambience. Blind men, hopheads, scatty women--how's a person supposed to do bookings around menageries like that?"*

"Relax, will you. Nobody's going to accuse this music of being jazz, it's more--" Phil came up short.

"It's a bit different," Wes ^{tried to} pitched in, "but--"

"Easiest thing to call it is spirituals," Monty confined things to.

Which made J.J. wince even harder. Delicately as a ballet performer he spun to Phil ~~Sherman~~.

"Philip, if you don't mind my saying so, this is not up your alley. I can throw a fishline into any congregation between here and Mobile, and come up with a spirituals singer."

"Since when are you so overrun with performers you can't even listen, J.J.?"

His bluff called, J.J. parked himself across the room. Wes went over by him to complete the audience. Monty stepped to the piano beside Phil, and approximate as the keyboard work was, *Mouthful of Stars* roared to life.

In the silence after Monty's last wall-shaking line of song, J.J. appeared perplexed. *"I don't know that one, and I have two uncles who are reverends."*

"Then you have one more chance," Phil swiftly set the hook. *"Shall we try him on that 'Jones' number, do you think, Monty?"*

"Unless you want to save it for that other manager you have in mind,"

Wes made up on the spot. Monty could have kissed him.

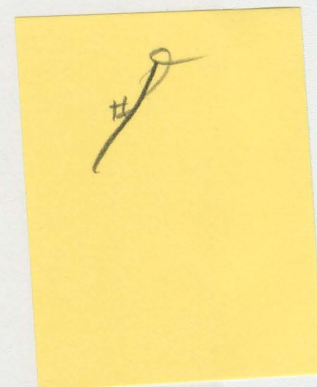
*tried to
pitch in*

Sherman

Phil getting a bit more hang of it at the piano, *Just Another Praying Jones* went even better than their first rendition. J.J., all three of them could see, was almost sold.

"*Maybe this is the real deal here,*" he weighed what he had heard as if the rest of them were not in the room. "*An authentic.*" As if reluctantly rousing from that vision, he looked around at them and came to business. "*He does have a voice on him, and something about those songs-- Montgomery, I can undertake to represent you. I would put you together with Cecil--no offense, Philip, but he's the best around at churchy piano.*" He paused, turned back to Monty, and the index finger was there like an exclamation point again. "*But coming from amateur, you need to know what you're letting yourself in for, back here. You have to nail it in every performance.*"

Nail it? Amateur, at what? Monty resisted asking the man if he had ever been in front of a rodeo bull that wanted his hide. Instead he said, with all the heft he could put into his voice: "*Can't back up and start over on the radio either. You can ask a million or so people all the way from Spokane to the Twin Cities to Chicago --nobody has heard me mess up yet.*"



Six full months since then, and that *yet* still hadn't even come close to occurring, and Monty was determined it never would. He put aside the song sheets, ready for the musicale. *That's that.* All right: it was time. He went over to the table where the newspaper waited.

He folded the paper back, scanning until he spotted the review. Read it, chewing his lip. Read it again, a lot more slowly. Shaking his head to try to clarify the imprint of the words, even though he knew what they meant, he ripped the piece out of the paper as though it would get loose in the room and do something more to him. Then he caught his breath and sat down to write to Susan.

at about where the measuring stick that was Manhattan Island
struck fortunes made before the Civil War,
Fifty blocks downtown, Wes was picking out railroads. He'd had a wall
rack installed behind his office door with slots for all his passes, now that he was
of the gandydancer fraternity, and as perquisites went, this one bemused him
more than most. *A lifetime ticket or one to bankruptcy, depending.* Each
elegantly printed pass entitled him to highest privileges--which was to say, a
private car--when he traveled on the rails of his fellow moguls. And should any

of d

of his ampersand-endowed confreres from the Chesapeake & Ohio or the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul or the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe wish to ride the twenty-two miles of the Teton & Two Medicine, naturally he would be only too happy to reciprocate.

A rap on the door broke his cross-country train of thought, but still in a prime mood he moved aside and called out, "Open, Sesame, or Hilly, as the case may be." Hilfiger, his secretary, came in looking as if his Teutonic dignity had something spilled on it. "Major, I cannot at all account for this. But Mister Gardiner is downstairs with some new things."

"Now? I don't understand. You know I'm getting ready to go away."

"I somehow overlooked him when I cleared your schedule. Shall I tell him it will have to wait until after Montana?"

"Use your head, man. Whatever he's come up with will be gone by then. Send him in, but--" he looked pointedly at the wall clock. "And go ahead and make my arrangements, will you. I'll be taking the Pennsy to Chicago, and let's make it the Milwaukee on the next leg." It went without saying that Wes's own railcar and red-carpet treatment from the Great Northern Railway, which profited handsomely at the Montana end of things each time a trainload of Williamson

cattle was shipped to market, were to be ready for him at the St. Paul depot as usual.

"Absolutely, Major."

"Oh, and Hilly, see if you can ring up--No, never mind," he canceled that with a wave of the hand that happened to go in the direction of Harlem. Lord knew, he was no expert on the owl-like life of a singer, but Monty very well might be sacked out, resting up for another night of performance. What was there to be said, anyway, welcome to the *World?* Wes wondered how he was taking that review. Lord, he should have picked up the phone to him first thing, but with all the commotion of putting house and family to rights for the summer... Too late now.

The only sound for a moment was the repentant slapslap of Hilfiger's soles as he hurriedly pattered down the stairs. The quiet was like a housewide trance, the machinery of mansion life stilled to only the occasional rustle of a distant maid. Making the most of the almost sinful spot of time, Wes virtually tiptoed over to his desk and sank into the lush silence. *Funny. The house has the best of*

While he waited for Gardiner, Wes busily packed things into his briefcase, like a man more than ready to go on furlough. it this time of year. We clear out, and the walls get to rest their ears. By this time

tomorrow the place would be like a ship frozen into an ice floe, sheets over all the Since having to bow out of Montana politics he had spent more of each year here--the vast old pile of a place had been imposed as part of Merrinell's dowry--and hoped he was not growing too used to its granitic grandeur. Guidebooks to this venerable neighborhood called it "captivating," and he supposed that was right if a person took it back to Latin: captivus, captive--clarity in the root, as usual. Evidently conceived on the architectutal conviction that a man's home was his Bastille, this family bastion of his in-laws permitted only peeps through high narrow windows to similar slit-eyed n'boring mansions.

furniture, inhabitants scattered to different latitudes. Not more than an hour ago Merrinell had left with the girls for her mother's summer place at Saratoga; time to break them in to that circle of society. Inasmuch as Merrinell's mother was a living refutation that a female could not be a pope, Wes had sympathy for his daughters in the immersion into parasol sodality ahead of them but nothing of real help. It was all he could do to keep his own head above water in the fathoms of family.

Gardiner padded in with his portfolio case, its leather as softly sumptuous as his manner. "Major, thank you for working me in."

"What's on offer today, Timothy?"

"A find, I can safely say. I think you'll be pleased with it."

Wes stayed expressionless, his guard and his hopes both up. This was not like Gardiner. As a rule, the rotund old dealer managed an elegantly diffident approach, as though strays from the orphanages of literature and history somehow simply showed up on his doorstep. Their longstanding arrangement was for Wes to have first look within the range of his interests, and if he didn't buy, Gardiner had merely to pop over a few blocks to the Morgan Library. But the item the dealer took out of his portfolio case now and lifted from its wrappings, he was

ctd

handling as if it had come home to stay. The ~~small buckram-backed~~ journal he

deposited on the desktop looked weathered from time rather than passage from

~~not covered by intended cover, not even deerskin~~
 hand to hand, and Wes felt an anticipatory tightness in his throat.

He studied the cataloguing slip. "Joseph Fields, Joseph Fields. Why do I

know that name?"

Looking wise but saying nothing, Gardiner let it sink in.

Wes's head snapped up. He threw away the first rule of haggling, he

couldn't help himself. He asked as if wishing: "The one with Lewis? In the Two
 Medicine country?"

"You anticipate me."

Wes wiped his fingertips on the serge insides of his thighs, then drew the
 journal to himself and opened it ever so carefully. Officerly skepticism still was
 uppermost in him. With astounding copiousness Lewis and Clark each had kept
 day-by-day account of the expedition they captained, as did their sergeant, Gass.
 The enlisted men had been told to do the same, but naturally few did. And those
 random contributions from the ranks supposedly were all archivally accounted
 for, long since. Prepared for all manner of disappointment from desultoriness to
 illegibility, Wes dipped into the age-crisped pages of the journal, and there the

elkskin

as if
 wishing,
 he asked

not
 standardly
 done up in
 cow leather

words stood. *"Drewyer and self sent hunting for sage hens....Capt Lewis & Reuben let our horses graize....The visinity was a plesent level plain but for one butte poking high and a lake stinking of alkali...."*

Alkali Lake: on the Double W's Flag Butte pastureland. Wes stared into the crude slants of the ink as though seeing a treasure map suddenly come clear. Joseph Fields and his brother Reuben and the hunter-scout Drouillard, he knew as if by rote, were with Meriwether Lewis on the exploration of the Two Medicine country. Just before nightfall at some hitherto unknown site along the river, they encountered a small band of Blackfeet, gave presents, and made wary camp with the Indians. *"We must wrisk the night with these persons Capt Lewis told us & so we decended to the river in company with them & formed a camp in the bottom where stood 3 solitery trees..."* Holding his breath, Wes turned the page to July 17th, 1805. *"I was on post & laid my gun beside me to reach & wake Reuben when one of the indians--the scoundrel Capt Lewis bestoed a friendship medal on during the night's parley--slipped behind me and took the gun."*

To Wes the rest unfolded with the familiarity of the Iliad: in the tussle that followed, Reuben Fields stabbed one Blackfoot to death and Lewis shot one in the belly. The exploring party famously had to make its escape in a marathon one-day

ride to the Missouri River, but the tilt of history was against the Blackfeet and other tribes from then on. Wes now had no doubt that he held in his hands the eyewitness account to the first blood spilled by American soldiers in the long contest for the prairie ^{of the West.} This had gone missing for one hundred and twenty years.

"Gardiner, how did you come by this?"

"Oh, things sometimes surface, Major."

Wes realized he was breaching protocol front, back, and sideways.

Collectors at his level necessarily embraced the pretense that provenance was a region of France. "Forget I asked. How much are you going to hold me up for, on this?"

"I must tell you, Harvard has expressed an interest in it."

Wes steeped his hands together, then ever so slowly lowered them until they pointed directly at the dealer. "Speaking of telling, drop a word to Pearson from me"--making it plain that he was letting it bounce here on Gardiner first before it reached the Harvard keeper of collections--"that as a donor I don't appreciate his bidding up materials he's eventually going to get anyway, damn it."

"I'll see that your concern is made known," Gardiner all but trilled. In contrition, he quoted a figure twenty percent too high instead of the usual forty,

historically
OK?
western?

Wes batted that down to a semi-reasonable asking price, and they reached the deal.

Gardiner still hovered over the journal with avuncular tenderness after Wes handed him the check. "Timothy? Is there something else?"

"I understand that you're pressed for time, but if you could spare a few minutes more--"

"Given the going rate so far today, I ought to call an immediate curfew."

"It's been on my conscience that I can't come up with that Cheyne item you asked for, some time back. But if you're interested in that period, I just happen to have a few interesting items with me."

"You just happen to." Wes smiled. He didn't believe in runs of luck, but fifteen minutes ago he wouldn't have had any faith in the existence of a vagabond Lewis and Clark Two Medicine journal either. "All right, lay them out."

A brief letter to a weekend hostess from Byron, standardly flirtatious. A set of poems in the hand of Wasson, the Flemish Romantic. Wes shook his head each time.

"This is rather nice," the dealer said. "An original of a verse by Pushkin. He must have copied it out fresh to look it over."

Wes knew the military legend--Pushkin's grandfather an Abyssinian prince who became a general for the Czar--better than he knew the poet's attainments, other than the customary one. "Ladies' man, wasn't he?"

"Sufficient to get himself done in a duel over one, I believe, Major."

"Russian isn't quite Greek enough to me," Wes scanned the boldly penned couplet in Cyrillic lettering. "How does it read?"

The dealer checked the accompanying translation.

"Not all of me is dust. Within my song,

safe from the worm, my spirit will survive."

Wes sat unmoving. Monty's singing at that last musicale flooded back to him. That's what Monty had seemed: *within* the Medicine Line song. The people there at that musical evening had turned to statues, not even the click of a glass, at his almost holy rendition of his father's prairie soldiery. Even Merrinell, who kept all her matters of the spirit confined east of the Palisades, remarked afterward how struck she was by it.

"Damn the poets," Wes said softly. "They tattoo all the way through. I'll take this, too."

The dealer left, a discreetly happy man, and Wes sat in the quiet company of this day's collected prizes, his thoughts once again on their way toward the West and Susan.

These pages went a bit lame during my regency in Angus's schoolroom, and now they threaten to gallop the hand off me to catch up. I find I can barely move the pen fast enough to keep up with the race of thoughts. I wonder what ninny it was who so blithely said a diary must be a servant--

Thunder sent another casual tremor through the loft room, the arriving storm dimming what should have been the peak of the day, and Susan got up from her desk and with guilty pleasure put on all the lights. After Scotch Heaven life the Helena house still felt unfamiliar and for that matter wastefully voluminous, the size of a factory, but to have electric light again was a treat she practically sprinkled behind her ears. She would not have traded all the gold of Last Chance Gulch for the teaching year she had just put in at the South Fork, nor would the same sum persuade her to do it over again. Her smock crackly with the weather's contribution to the atmosphere of energy, she sat back down to the pages brightly awaiting her continuance:

--not a master. Ho ho. As if the habit of summing one's days into ink could be as lax as whether to dust the top of the cupboard or not. I can no more ignore the need to keep track of life--as much of it as can be made to fit in these pages--than Wes could his confessional booth. And I find that there is the odd benefit that with the passage of time the words hold more than I knew I was putting there. I look back not even a year--she flipped pages; an eyebrow went up and stayed that way--and I find Monty in despair, Monty persevering, Monty exasperating, Monty in magical voice.

As she composed her thoughts at pen-length, the rain din built second by second. Merciless rods of it determined to puncture the roof, from the sounds of it. "Lord, if ye happen to be of a mind/Send us rain," Angus's inevitable appropriate weather couplet rattled in the back of her mind, "And if so be it ye spill some/Send it again." When the roar on the roof hit such a pitch she could not hear herself think, she gave in and quit the desk again, this time for the gable window and the rare sight of excessive moisture in Montana. Hollyhocks in the yard were rocking madly in the wind, rainwater puddling into small swamps around them. There was a smell of great freshness in the air, and the temperature was vigorously dropping about a degree a minute. The only thing feeble about

thundershowers this time of year was duration; hoping against hope she checked the sky, and while the stormy section looked like black sheep's wool, already on both sides of it were patches of bland blue-gray. She watched at the window until the sharp-edged squall rumbled off. Then returned to the diary and noted in brackets that not a drop of this worm-drowner would have reached far enough to do the Two Medicine country any good.

She paged back some more, under the spell of the inked words and their curlicues of memory. Maybe it was the ozone, but everything today seemed sprung out of the usual sense of passage of time. It felt curiously like adapting some foreign custom, this diarying in the middle of the day. Siesta in reverse. The role of woman of leisure did not come naturally to her, but she was working at it. Her hair was down--no pupils today, of course, and none in prospect until she could get the music school resurrected and a number of miffed mothers soothed--and the shawling effect on her shoulders was another sumptuous diversion from usual. As she read back over entry after entry, moments leaping out at her, she twiddled strands of the tresses she had let grow all her time at Scotch Heaven, idly judging their distance from gray. Reaching the point of doing that, was she. *Vanity, thy name is human.* Automatically she reached down a

music sheet and jotted that in the margin in case it could be made to fit into the operetta somewhere.

Suddenly the pen had a mind of its own again: *What odd bits we remember*, she found herself resuming on today's marathon diary entry. *Monty's letter mentions Mrs. Gustafson's fearsome hotcakes--the plop of them hitting the griddle was in itself almost tough enough to chew--and I have thought back time and again to that X on the stage, to flatter it by calling it that, there that first day at Fort Assinniboine. What a nerve I had, chalking that mark and letting on to him that standing right there would solve all stage woes. I recall him looking long and hard at it (and doubtless at the proposition of myself as teacher). When he stood his ground to that barn of an auditorium and my asking of him, I knew we would get somewhere.*

Susan fidgeted the pen, rolling it contemplatively between the fingers of her writing hand, while she worked back to the page of that first day of scouring traces of cows out of the homestead house, the one about Scotch Heaven not amounting to much as a site but unbeatable as a sight. She tried to think back with exactness. Had she meant for those words to carry a whiff of epitaph for Scotch Heaven even then? They would have had to be astral as comets to predict the final

human sum of the old valley: Adair Barclay McCaskill and Susan Duff its last residents. And Adair only until she had Christmased with Varick's family. At the new year she had gone to Scotland on a visit that showed no sign of ending.

Susan had spent the full winter--fortunately an open one; only for a few nights had she put up at the Hahns', nearest family to the schoolhouse--and the swift spring in a Scotch Heaven that was as much apparition of its homestead decades as it was creek and valley. Varick had not decided yet on the disposition of the McCaskill homestead, ghostly indeed now without Angus and the sheep. For that matter, she still was making up her own mind what to do with the lower end of the valley. Ninian's land. With more than grass and hay attached to it.

That decision would keep for now. She read back over what she had written so far today. It constituted singing the scales, warming up one's voice. With a considerable ^{intake of air} ~~breath~~, she commenced to the next:

Wes and I are like flighty children playing with matches. One of us ignites... and the other in scaredy-cat fashion stamps it out. Then the turns are reversed.

She wrote in that vein until her hand began to play out.

~~intake
of air~~

Well, at least there was one of them who had life's ground solidly under him at the moment. She plucked up the review Monty had sent, for the sheer savor of reading it over, every blessed word:

Fate lent a hand, or in this case an appreciative ear, to the inspired program of "spirit" songs performed by Montgomery Rathbun at Aeolian Hall last evening. To this hearer, and an audience unanimous in clapping and stamping for encore after encore, the setting was as apt as if by divination: in Mr. Rathbun's wondrous presentation it is as if hitherto hidden songs have always existed just beyond us, tingling in the air, and through him they sing forth like windtunes through some great Aeolian harp.

This he achieves in a voice of dimensions that are hard to measure. His is not the welling bass-baritone of Paul Robeson, deep as the keel of a slave ship, but a built-from-the-bottom-up tone that casts long shadows and etches the ground of life under the travels of his restless songs, qualities that can perhaps be traced to his background as a man of the prairie. That repertory, be it said, is fresh, no mean feat in this heaven-sent-by-way-of-Harlem season of resurging spirituals, when almost weekly new arrangements of timeless field songs can sometimes resemble musical chairs.

The songs he brings are only an added gift, however. Montgomery Rathbun could sing the pages of the telephone directory and lift your soul. His is the latest and perhaps most phenomenal troubador's role in the renaissance of "sorrow songs" heralded in the pre-war recitals of Harry Burleigh, enhanced when Roland Hayes added spirituals to his classical presentations, furthered by the innovative scorings of the piano-and-tenor duo of J. Rosamund Johnson and Taylor Gordon, and burnished to a luster now that the profoundly gifted Paul Robeson has turned from dramatic roles to musicianship. At the onset of

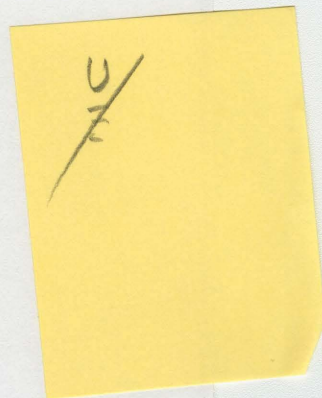
an earlier generous artistic flourishing, Ralph Waldo Emerson proffered to Walt Whitman: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere." Harlem's chorus of spiritual-singing virtuosos must similarly now pay their respects to Montgomery Rathbun, who stands forth as their latest compatriot and rival.

All that and the reviewer did not even have an inkling of how rocky that bottom had been. Reading back, finding the diary days when some bit of coaching or coaxing had worked and both of them felt another breathworth of soar in his song, Susan was starved all over again for that experience of the lessons with Monty. *Don't I wish there was another one where he came from.* Leading the South Fork schoolchildren in "*Flow Gently, Sweet Afton*" in preparation for the program all the parents were invited to, there had been times when she thought she would break off into a maddened howl. Very well then, face up and admit it, she had been spoiled by the particularities of Monty's voice. At least she was not totally bereft of it. One more time she picked up the letter the review had come with. "*I did not pay the man to write this, honest.*" The handwriting, in pencil, was familiar from the brief greetings he sent from wherever he sang; they amounted to postcards mailed in envelopes, safe from small-town post office eyes. She could picture the jackknife-sharpened stub, the earnest crouch over the

stationery--somehow the words even stood slow and careful on the paper--and found it even more rewardful that he thought she was worth the diligence. This letter was almost warm to the touch. *"Something, isn't it? To think that the spirit songs are having a heyday? And that the foreground, they call it, was the old wagontrack where you about made me run my legs off?"* She smiled a moment at his growing penchant for question marks--he seemed determined to make even his punctuation count as much as it could--and skipped on to the bottommost sentence: *"I hope the old town is ready for me?"* He was coming to Helena on his concert tour through the West. She circled the day on her calendar. Ahead of it by a week was the Xed-over set of days she was to spend with Wes in the Two Medicine country.

Under the highstanding sun the cattle were mothering up. Their mode of reacquaintance was repeating itself a couple of thousand times at once, every cow moaning anxiously and making sure with thorough sniffs that the calf trying to raid milk from her udder was entitled to it.

Next to Wes in the shade of the boss tent about a quarter of a mile away, Susan speculatively watched the bawling scene along the lakeshore. Hers was not



the only appraisal of what was being done to a calm noon at Lower Two Medicine Lake: around the reflecting rim of water, sphinxlike mountains with manes of timber seemed to draw in closer to frown down over the intrusion.

She glanced at Wes, still busy checking his tallybook before he and whoever was sent out from the Blackfoot Indian Agency counted the cattle onto this Reservation allotment, its rugged foothills practically in the lap of Glacier National Park. Simply by eye the massed cattle seemed to Susan an excess of livestock for any summer range, but mob of feeders though this might be, she knew it was only a portion of the Williamsons' growing Deuce W herd. Thousands more were out in the coulees of Fort Assinniboine and the other outposts of the new ranch. Greater thousands than that were spread as usual on the home range of the Double W. The tallybook in Wes's hands had him knitted in study, flipping from one page to the next, back, further pages on into the black-and-white arithmetic of herds and necessary grass; it must be like trying to stay ahead of locusts, she thought. Next to everything the Bible had to say, the one saying she had grown up hearing was that the Williamsons always had more cattle than country. Wes, she was seeing for herself on this cattle drive, dealt not only in

ranchland and beef on the hoof but the attic space of geography; nooks and crannies of pasture like this under the planet's eaves.

A series of whoops and orders being shouted above the mooing drew Susan's attention back to the trail herd. Perhaps stuffing this many cattle this high into the timbered foothills of the Rockies went against the human ear and common sense, but she couldn't deny that it made quite a picture. Several day-herders now slouched in their saddles at strategic points around the milling herd while the main file of riders headed in, their roans and sorrels and pintos mirrored in the bowl of lake like rich dabs of color on a clear blue palette. As they dismounted around the chuck tent for the midday meal, the bearded cook directed the traffic of Stetsons and batwing chaps with an imperial ladle. She tickled behind Wes's ear to make him look up and take in the scene. "Even I admit it's like a Russell, except nobody is bucking a bronc through the pork and beans."

Wes gave an appreciative wisp of smile. "Charley apparently never met a horse that wasn't snorty at chow time."

"He portrays schoolmarms as a pernicious influence, too."

"While I think they are nature's highest achievement."

“Do you really? I’m afraid we have loftier rivals, right around here.” She took in again the glacier-scarved mountains, augmented at this time of day by puffy clouds with flat, gray bases as if they had been sponged against the earth on that side. “Doesn’t it remind you of that time in the Alps?”

He swung around to look at her, losing his place in the tallybook. “We were never in the Alps together.”

“Just testing how well you keep track. And your ability to tell me from a Heidi. And how many yodels you’ve never yodeled.”

“Not to mention your capacity to tease the life out of me.”

“I hoped I was teasing it into you, Wes.”

“All right.” He laughed as if to demonstrate he hadn’t forgotten how.

“Guilty as charged. I’m more wrapped up in the travels of cows than I want to be. Whit has always been trail boss.” At the moment Whit was in California, sorting out Wendell after some scrape frowned on by the college authorities. Getting the bearer of the Williamson family escutcheon through Stanford was requiring increasingly strong doses of fathering. “I’ll make amends,” Wes promised while he reached and took Susan’s wrist as though he were a penitent who just happened to have a glint of another sort in his eye. “What would you

say to a basket supper and sunset at the upper lake, when I'm done with the Agency people? Whit would never spoil you like that, but if he hears about it and takes my job away, so much the better."

Susan had to smile back at him over that. She was no expert on trail drives, but she knew Whit also would never have shoved a couple of thousand head of cattle ³ a mile out of the way, as Wes had done the day before yesterday, to keep them from trampling the vicinity of the site of the Lewis party's fight with the Blackfeet, and then spent the afternoon bumping over that prairie in the Deussenberg, navigating from one landmark to the next in the Fields journal with her in wonderment at his side and Gustafson peering over the steering wheel for badger holes. She had a diarist's feel for the quirks of opportunity it must have taken to set the Lewis and Clark explorations down onto pages, but an unearthed ^{at all} journal fresh from midtown New York still seemed to her as randomly propitious as lightning illuminating a safari map. She had tried to wheedle out of Wes the cost of such a piece of historical luminescence, but he wouldn't tell. "Beyond price," was all he would say. "Like you."

"Supper that way sounds grand," she responded now, along with a return squeeze of his arm. "This is rude of a guest, but will you clear something up for

When at last the ill-used automobile nosed along a particularly ~~shar~~ precipitous brink of white-clay bluff, Wes let out the shout, "There!" Directly below, in the colossal rupture of the prairie where the Two Medicine River twisted through, stood the three huge old solitary cottonwood trees, like ancient attendants minding the campsite. With wild roses on the bluff blowing in the wind, Wes and herself sat there gazing down into the century before, retrieved by a single witnessing pen.

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me? Why are you putting cattle onto rough country like this, and for that matter why isn't Whit having a conniption about it? These cows will have to work uphill for every spear of grass. Not to mention that the timber up here is full of blowdowns, and probably bear."

If her line of inquiry hit home, squarely in the tallybook, he didn't show it. "The Deuce W needs shaping up before we run the full number of stock on it," he said almost idly. "Some windmill watering holes, fencing to be done, that sort of thing."

"Short grass again, you mean."

"Your father's daughter." That drew him enough of a look that he hastily tacked on: "When it comes to grass. What was I thinking, trying that on you." Suddenly serious as could be, he folded his arms on his chest and contemplated the herd already starting to munch its way up a slope that turned to timber just ahead of them. "If we ever have anything but a dry summer, we can quit being cow conductors. For now, these bossies are going to have to pretend they're mountain goats."

He paused, then returned to her question. "Whit will just have to put up with the fact that I no longer can buy acres as fast as he can buy cows. You're

right that we'll be nicked on a lease like this. A considerable number of head will end up inside grizzlies or at the bottom of gulches with broken legs. Probably more will end up in stewpots--we have to see that as a tithe." He gave a slight shrug.

Susan was surprised he could be that casual at the prospect of losing cows to enterprising Blackfeet. Rustling was rustling, wouldn't you think? Particularly if you were a Williamson?

"Speaking of fathers," she got in, still trying to follow his thinking, "let me be more rude yet while I'm at it. What would yours think of paying good money for land this time of year and then having to walk away from it in the fall?"

That turned Wes dramatically philosophical. "Why do you even ask?" He tossed a hand of futility in the air. "He would think Whit and I have taken screaming leave of our senses, as the old always think about the young. As Whit and I think about our own offspring."

"Oho. Old now, are we."

"It's only a masculine trait. Women grow more fascinating."

"Especially in a cow camp," she whittled that down. "Your riders look at me as if I have two heads." She mimicked a cowboy gape that was at once shy,



sly, and apprehensive. "But you, oh no, you don't get that from them even when you chase off across the prairie in the Doozy after Lewis and Clark. I hope, my dear Major Williamson, that doesn't mean they're used to seeing you with a woman who isn't your wife."

At first she thought he wasn't going to answer, but then as though it were a duty to report this sort of thing he told her: "They seem to expect something of the sort of me, actually."

"Really?" Susan's tone was as if she was taking a scientific sounding. "It has come to that? Where there's a rich man, there positively has to be a mistress tagging along?"

"For God's sake, Susan. You know there's more than that to it, with us."

"No, this interests me. Shouldn't I see myself as a kind of collectible, like that journal you can barely stand to put down? And you as the connoisseur of sufficient means I've been lucky enough to be plucked up by? Privilege has its rank, we both recognize that. If you were one of your cow chousers squatting around the bean pot over there, we never would have had the least chance at one another, now would we."

Wes studied her thoughtfully, then stepped over and kissed her for as long as it took.

Susan brought up a hand and ever so lightly ran a finger back and forth along the side of where their lips met, as if saving it to taste. Eventually she stroked free and drew a breath. "I suppose you think that's a way of ending an argument. It's not bad."

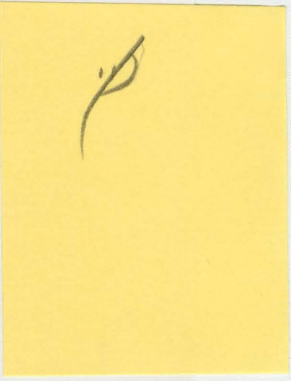
"High praise. I can hardly wait until we outright fight. Add that to supper, can we?"

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than she gave him a soft biff to the collarbone, as if to announce her readiness to trade love taps any time he wanted. Wes chortled, and stepped away to collect his tallybook. "I hate to cease hostilities. But I'd better go down and run through things with Petrie"--his foreman--"so we'll be ready when the Agency people show up."

"Wes. There's something on my mind--surprise, surprise, right?"

Reluctantly he pivoted to her and stood as if braced for the worst. Only to hear her say:

"How would it be if I let you have my piece of the North Fork?"



His face lit up, but she had anticipated that. Only in his eyes did she catch the flicker of the chain lightning of his mind.

"On lease, I mean," she stipulated. "This summer, and we could see about next."

She could see the calculations flying in him, cows into acres, acres into cows, the capacity of the North Fork as an ever-running watering hole, the tonnage of its hay--"Susan, it would help on the Double W herd. In a big way."

"I want you to put a fencing crew in there first. I won't stand for cows mooching onto the McCaskill place from mine, I don't care if Whit has to sit out there himself shooping them away."

"I'll see that the fences are so tight not even a wee sleekit cowering tim'rous beastie could get through." Wes took an eager step toward her, although he knew better than to kiss her this time. Sticking to business if that was where she wanted to be, he vouched: "Of course we'll pay you top dollar."

"You'd better."

"I'll tell you what, I can bring the papers with when I come in for Monty's concert."

That wasn't her preference, but she held to the mood: "Two occasions for the price of one, why not?"

"On that. I'd like us as much together there as we can--you'll see, he's gotten astounding." Susan waited, knowing what was coming. Managing this was the one thing that seemed to throw him, and he was not much better at it than ever when he awkwardly asked: "You'll be able to come in the warm company of Mrs. Gus, won't you?"

"I wouldn't miss the chance for anything, even Mrs. Gus."

Looking buoyed, Wes went off to muster the cattle for counting. This time Susan didn't watch the panorama of herd and riders and wary mountains. She sat in the tent, distractedly leafing through the valuable journal Wes had given prideful place on his portable desk. *Beyond price. Like you.* Such woo from a Wes with infinite cattle on his mind. *I'll see that the fences are so tight not even a wee sleekit cowering tim'rous beastie could get through.* Passable Robert Burns from the man who ordinarily fumbled the Scottish tongue, no less. Where did he summon that from, even given his knack to perform up to what nearly any circumstances asked? She should know something about gauging that capacity in him, and it bothered her that she did not. Rehearsals were her field, but run those

circumstances

clinging sentences of Wes's over and over in her mind as she was, she could not decide whether he had rehearsed those lines.

"Hated to ask you to come all the way across town, but I didn't know how else--"

"All that way, tsk. This is a treat. I'd have been happy just to poke my head backstage and say hello after you floor them tonight."

"Couldn't let you off that easy. Get you something? Tea and honey?"

"You. Inflict my own medicine on me, would you. But thank you, nothing. Monty, this--I have to say, I'm impressed."

"Not exactly Fort Skin-and-Bone, is it." He followed her gaze around the parlor of the Broadwater Hotel, Helena's finest, which made it Montana's finest. Now that he and she were established in the plush chairs, nicely out in the open but far enough from the lobby not to have every word overheard, he felt relieved. Even yet this was not easy to make happen right, not here, not anywhere that he knew of. From the window of his room he had watched like a hawk, if hawks are ever nervous, until she pulled into the grounds in her car, its doors and fenders still peppered with what likely was North Fork mud. Then made himself



hover just back out of sight at the top of the stairwell while she announced her purpose to the desk clerk, to see how it went before he would have to go down and try to bluff the clerk. *Damn it. All we want to do is visit with each other like human beings.* They lucked out on the clerk: the man turned out to be the father of one of her pupils in years past, and Susan's sweetly put "*here for a musical consultation with your famous guest Mister Rathbun*" did not stand his hair on end. Here then they sat, decorous amid the nearly smothering decor of velvet and Victoriana and tasseled rugs. Monty could tell she meant surprised along with impressed. "Year ago, they wouldn't have let me in here," he said what they both knew but it helped clear the parlor air by saying it. "Maybe even now, but the Major put in a word."

"Tell me whether I'm seeing things. A man out in the gardens looks all the world like Bailey."

"None other. I had him hired. There's a bruiser or two around somewhere, too." He rushed through that as if it was an ordinary part of business, but Susan was looking at him so pointedly that he broke off and made a small patting motion in the air. "Nothing to be excited about. The people I'm with are sort of spooked by what the clucks tried on us, is all. I thought they

add to Broadwater:

Monty:(thought JJ & Cece wd back out of town) "when I told them about the Confederate Gulch gold and the Johnny Rebs who turned into galvanized Yankees out here as soon as they had money in their pocket."

were going to back out of town when we came in past that fountain in honor of the Johnny Rebs. Took them around to Clore Street and they settled down some." His turn to put a point to her with his eyes. "Life been treating you all right, I hope?"

"Atrociously. I haven't been around a world-beating voice for what seems like ages. Until the one I'll hear tonight."

"More what I had in mind was you being out there alone at Scotch Heaven, ^{all that while} It's been bothering--"

Surprised at the urgency in his voice, she cut in with what she always said when people got going on how much time she spent with herself: "Don't fret, 'alone' isn't spelled the same as 'lonely.'"

"Maybe around the edges, it's not," he said as if his experience did not jibe with hers.

She made a conceding murmur and ducked onto surer ground. "At any rate, you can quit worrying--I'm going to lease out the homestead. Helena has me on her hands again, poor old town."

Now Monty was the surprised one. "The Major didn't say anything to me about you giving up the place."

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"No? Did you check the reflections in his vest buttons?" Fanning a hand and holding it with her other, Susan expertly mimicked a person playing cards close to the chest.

He acknowledged that with a slow nod. "I'll need to do that when he comes in from the ranch tonight, you think?"

"Whit's, too, while you're at it. You knew you're going to be honored with his presence, didn't you?"

"You must be kidding. He's setting foot off the place when there's no livestock involved?" It was on the tip of his tongue to say what next, the ghost of old Mister Warren showing up along with them tonight at the Marlowe Theater and growling out *I take it back, Monty, go ahead and blow your bugle, boy*. But her and the Major, as close or apart as rails of a railroad track, depending on when you squinted in their direction--right now she was really up on the doings of the Williamsons, and he didn't want to tromp flatfooted into whatever that meant. He switched back over to his original intention. "I started to say, it's bothered the living daylights out of me that you were where the Klan hoodoos could have got at you. I know you wrote that the Williamsons made it too hot for them, but--"

"Scalding, was more like it." Departures in the night. Examples made by Whit and his ax-handle crew. Sheriffs and county attorneys suddenly rigorous. Wes and the influences he could bring to bear had taken the Klan out of the center of Montana like lice soaked out of sheets. "My neck never felt at risk, any of the school year," she maintained. "No excitement except the boys tipping over the girls' privy, and that's eternal. No, I've done my bit in memory of Angus and helped Adair close up their place, and now I'm tucked back into the house here and the Double W's cows inhabit the North Fork." Susan made a gesture, that was enough of that. Looking across at Monty, she sent him a mock teacherly frown intended to let him know she was inspecting his progress. He had filled out somewhat, but solidly, no jowls or paunch. His nice gray suit would not give any of Wes's a run for the money--whose would?--but it had a tailor's touches. All along the line, so far as she could see, he looked as if New York life agreed with him. Still, he was here, not there. "Somehow I didn't expect to see you back, this soon."

"Denver is next on the tour." He grinned. "I convinced my manager this is practically on the way."

Susan's eyebrows were up. "I must have left geography out of those lessons of yours."

"That'd be about the only thing. You know what works slick, that I'd have rather eaten dirt but you made me do? That music stand." He had particularly wanted her to know the audience problem was whipped. "Can't explain it, but I don't get choky with the songsheets right there, even if I never need them."

"Told you." Her face lit, she urged: "Now your turn. Those fancy-pantsy musicales of yours--tell all."

From there on their conversation kept jumping its banks. He told her about hobnobbing with the Rabiznaz, wanted to know how her own music was coming. She told him she was within shouting distance of the end of the operetta if the shout could be a better song than she had managed to come up with yet, and what were his living arrangements in Harlem like? They were back and forth at this a mile a minute until they heard a notifying cough. In the doorway of the parlor stood J.J. and Cecil, fluffy bathtowels over the arm of each.

"This is Miss Duff, my teacher I told you about," Monty said, reeling off the introductions. "Wasn't for her, the most I could look forward to would be changing sparkplugs every three months."

"Ah? Then the ears of the world are in your debt, Mrs. Duff," J.J. said with something between a nod and a bow. Cecil's wordless acknowledgment of her certifiably amounted to no more than a nod.

"It's Miss."

"Mizzz Duff, excuse me all hollow." J.J.'s sibilant antic made Monty want to bat him one.

"Sorry to interrupt," J.J. swept on, "but we were just passing. We are off to the waters," meaning the Natatorium across the hotel grounds. "Cecil here needs to cook like an egg to thaw out from this Rocky Mountain air, he claims. We are told we will have a pool to ourselves." J.J. smiled as if at the wonder of that. "Which will then be drained after we use it, I gather the procedure is. Western hospitality is really quite something."

"We did give the world Monty, from out here," Susan offered as though it were a neutral observation. "We may be coasting a bit much on that."

"That was generous, I can't help but admit." J.J. fussily checked his watch against the parlor's grandfather clock as if two opinions were needed on the hour of day, then recited: "Keep an eye on the time, Montgomery, don't forget to catch some rest."

"It's as good as caught, J.J."

"Good day, Miss Duff. Been our pleasure."

Monty watched the pair of them go, shaking his head. "See what you and the Major got me into? They both know their stuff, but--what're you laughing about?"

"I just realized. Here you are in the Broadwater with a manager and an accompanist and Bailey and bruisers, all the trappings I could have dreamed of for you, and I've never even heard you in front of an audience."

"You have so. Not their fault they were pigeons. Toughest critics I've had yet, though."

Susan surprised herself as well as him by giggling. Monty chuckled at the scale-like run of that, which tickled her some more, and then they were both in helpless gusts of laughter, two Two Medicine ragamuffins carried up past Fort

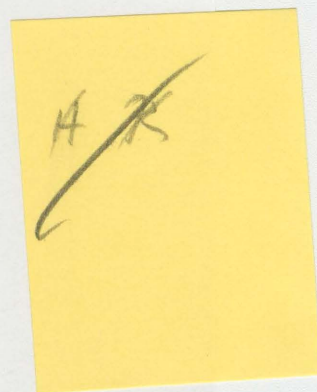
Assinniboine's pigeon poop and all other mires to make their marks on life by the glorious force of music.

Susan at last wiped her eyes. "Stop. Halt. Enough. I really should be going."

"Not before I put you to work a little." Before she could blink, he reached something out from behind his chair and rested it in his lap. "Do you mind?

Wanted to show you a change in *Mouthful of Stars*---I think I misremembered how the ~~Holy~~ ~~Rollers~~ used to do the chorus of that." As he dug out the piece of music she saw that he carried the songsheets in a leather case embossed with the initials MR; cowhide had a different place in his life now. "I think it should go"--at the back of his throat he deeply crooned down, then up, up, instead of up, down, up.

Susan hesitated. Was this something he needed done, or a pat on the head for her? He had not been the butter-spreading type before, but that was before. The question lasted no time before giving way to the spell of music in his throat and his hands. "Let's just see," she said, a bit out of breath, and was up from her chair and confronting the upright piano, its teeth yellow with age, that claimed a corner of the parlor.



Plinking until she found a reasonably reliable run of keys, she coaxed out an amendment to the tune, Monty at the end of the piano listening keenly. At her nod, he sang the chorus that way atop her playing. She knew she probably shouldn't--the justifiable wrath of his manager was somewhere between there and the Natatorium--but she plunged into the whole song, Monty's voice all but taking down the walls of the parlor.

"There, then." Past the ache at the back of her heart for more of this, she made herself quit, saying she would fix up the follow-sheet for his accompanist if he liked. Monty dug in his shirt pocket, came up with a stub of pencil. With great care she wrote in the notes, guided by her own hum now. One last thing and then she would go. "Could I take a peek at the songsheets? It would be fun for me tonight to know the order of songs."

"You bet." He gravely handed her the sheaf that represented all their work together. "That's how I've got it put together for here. Oh, and over Cecil's just about dead body, I always stick in the Medicine Line one wherever the program feels like it needs a lift."

"Why doesn't he want you to use that one?"

"Because he doesn't like it."

"So then why do you use it?"

"Because he doesn't like it."

That set them off riotously again. Susan sobered an instant before he did--

what am I doing, this man has a performance tonight-- and resolutely stood up

from the piano stool. Monty was looking at her as if trying to remind himself of

something. She cocked her head, waiting for whatever it was. Finally he said:

"You're wearing your hair down. It's nice." *Hesitantly he put out his hand for the songbook.* cx a

"Trying to keep up. Speaking of hair, it's really time I get out of yours."

Taking the music from her, he fumbled it back into the leather case.
He gestured, as though he would change things if it were in his power. cx a

"We have a rehearsal, after J.J. and Cecil finish their soak. I'd have asked you to come to that, but--"

she said fondly, sadness in there, too.
"Monty, I would have turned you down flat," I'd be one too many irons in cx a

the fire there. Seeing you this way meant more."

All those other Saturday nights in town, and I never even made it through

the door of this place. He moved back and forth in an arc across centerstage there

afternoon empty in the Marlowe Theater, singing the two lines "When I was young *and* *blade* in my

prime, I dabbed my X on the Medicine Line" over and over as he sought the spot

empty

where it felt right to stand. The massive chandelier out over the seats scintillated as if beaconing him to step this way or that. He grinned, just from general joy at treating this fancy stage like a parade ground. *No way this was in the running with the Zanzibar, back then. Some of those scrapes, ow. It's a wonder I'm here with my guts still in me.* He kept an eye on J.J., audience of one, who was prowling the empty seats, nodding when the sound reached him just so, shaking his head when it was not so good. Monty wheeled, tried it from closer to the lip of the stage. Took a step the other direction, cast "*When I was young....*" into the air of the theater from there as though flyfishing into promising water. Right from the start of the rehearsal he had been feeling exceptionally fine, as loose and full of jingle as when he was a much younger man challenging the rodeo bulls. The stage manager stood off at stage left patiently plucking his sleeve garters until Monty called over, "I think I found it here."

The man came out and chalked an X where the toe of Monty's shoe was indicating. "I'll be right back with your music stand and we can see how the lighting suits you," he told Monty and disappeared backstage.

Cecil had been sitting in wait at the piano. Now that Monty's voice was not claiming the theater, he noodled at the keyboard of the Steinway, apparently without satisfaction. "They call this a piano in this burg?"

Monty and J.J. exchanged glances. They might have been concerned about Helena's taste in pianos if they had not heard Cecil make this same complaint about Boston's. Before J.J. could say anything, Monty observed: "Looks to me like it has all the keys, Cece."

"This new follow-sheet, man, I don't see why that chorus goes--"

"Because now it's right," Monty said easily.

Frowning, Cecil tugged at the cuffs of his tux and looked to J.J. for justice.

With a show of judiciousness the manager sized up the two of them. Poor Cecil, eagerly waiting for fame to devour him. Monty was a different breed of cat. In off these wide open spaces. Monty reminded him of the Senegalese, when they stood there blank and calm sharpening those three-sided French bayonets as the attack barrage poured down only yards away. J.J. still could not put his finger on it exactly, but there was a solo quality about Monty that ran deeper than what issued from his mouth. In all his time as a manager, he had

never come across a talent who climbed so fast yet kept his head about him. And that white woman, whatever she was about, had given Monty over readymade for stage work. "They're his songs, Cecil. Ours not to reason why if he feels better primping them."

"Probably be an audience like an icebox, no matter what I do," Monty by now had reached the trouper's point of courting good luck by invoking bad.

"You're sounding first-rate," J.J. told him, more than ritually. "A little more geared-up for this than you maybe need to be, though. You don't have to bust a gusset for these people just because you're back home. They'll clap if you so much as step out there and clear your throat, you watch."

Monty retorted firmly.
 "Nothing doing," *+ tonight,* All out. Goes for you, too, Cecil. Don't be on bad terms with that piana, hear?"

Just then the stage manager called to ~~Monty~~ *him* for the lighting check, and the other two retreated to backstage.

Cecil was still steamed. "Jace?" He was the only person in the world who called J.J. that, particularly with a permanent question mark. "What goes, anyway? I was kidding around about the piano. But messing with the follow-sheet without even talking to me about it, that's something else. He's been acting

M retorted firmly.

high and mighty since we got here. I know these are his old stomping grounds, but--"

"So let him stomp for the folks," J.J. said tiredly. "We'll sort all this out in Denver."

The bromide for the unspeakable is, 'Words fail me.' I vow they will not.

Susan was panting markedly with the effort this took. When she caught up to realization of it, she drew a careful series of breaths to steady herself before writing the next. *Tracing in ink what happened last night is the only way I know to tell the world ahead how one thing followed another, each piece of time a shard streaking lightninglike to the next.*

This night she had come upstairs in something like a daze of duty, the rhythm of obligation as insistent in her as the beat of her heart. Her hand was fixed to the diary page before she made herself pause and review everything that had danced out of place since the last time she seated herself there. The past twenty-four hours were a jumble, at every level. She blinked hard, barely staying dry-eyed, as it registered on her that Samuel's photograph had been toppled. Might she just now have done that herself, in her willed unseeing reach for ink,



pen, and pages to testify on? Or--? Whether or not it was her own doing, she picked the photograph up off its face, stood it where it belonged, and again put herself for all she was worth into her pen hand.

Mrs. Gus and I had arrived to the theater together, bookends that don't match but surprisingly few people seem to notice. An audience huge for Helena was pouring in and the lobby was a crisscross of former pupils of mine grinning at me as if they had good sense and mothers on the warpath about my absence for the past--dear me--year and then some. I fended as well as circumstances would allow, promising probably too many of them that I now would be giving lessons again and if they dreamt of their child one day filling a theater this way, lo, that chance awaited in my music parlor. I could not account for why I was such a sudden celebrity until someone said in near-awe "You've met Montgomery Rathbun then, what is he like?" and that quick it dawned. Word had spread from Milly Tarrant's father, the desk clerk, that the famous Mr. Rathbun had sought me out for advice on a point of music; the image of us meeting like heads of state of the musical world there in the parlor of the Broadwater would have bowled us over at Fort Assinniboine.

Of course every stitch of a performance night interests me, even the straggly processional of the audience sorting itself into place, and we were going in to our seats early when Mrs. G. looked back over her shoulder and said, "The misters are here."

There was a last nimbus of sun going down behind Mount Helena and a moon like a globe lantern as well when Wes and Whit climbed out of the big car. Lilacs bloomed, their color deepening with the day, in the hillside neighborhood across the street from the Marlow Theater. Summer on such an evening was slow to step down from the longest day, a week ago; dusk and warmth would linger as if night was temporarily postponed. Because of the time of year Monty's performance was set for 8:30 so people could do the necessary for their gardens and lawns, come in from fishing or porch-sitting, round up the musically inclined members of the family and stroll down the gulch to the theater, men carrying their suit jackets carefully over their arms.

Whit, though, lodged a complaint to the evening air that seemed to have come in on a tropical tradewind. "Damnedest weather. Still feels like the middle of the afternoon."

"Is there any weather you do like?" Wes inquired, genuinely wondering, while he gestured that Whit's tie was riding cockeyed. "You came back from ten days of California sun complaining it didn't give you anything to get your teeth into."

"This is about as balmy as it was there, and you can't tell me that's natural. Gus, I need to fix my choker. Would you--?" As Gustafson held the door of the Deussenberg open at an angle that provided enough reflection, Whit bent down and used the car window as a mirror to adjust his white tie.

Waiting for him beneath the modernly elegant vertical marquee of the Marlow, Wes took the chance to scan the streets and was reassured to find the policemen posted where they ought to be--some up at the corner of Broadway and the Gulch, others down here at the intersection by the theater--just conspicuous enough. Whit was in the Knights of Columbus with the Helena chief of police, ~~and~~ and it had been decided that any dregs of the Klan who showed up with picket signs were going to find themselves charged with spitting on the sidewalk. Privately Wes believed last summer's crackdown had sent any of them who counted slinking off to safer climes, tails between their legs, but an extra shift of police should make Monty's entourage feel better. Right then a lantern-jawed man

and I

stepped out of the lobby, took a look around, and nodded to him. One of Bailey's. They probably were unnecessary too, but wouldn't hurt either. "What do you think then," Whit was asking as he gave a last tug at his tie and straightened up, "will Monty add '*The Palm Trees Sway When You Say I May*' to his list tonight?"

Wes looked at his brother in surprise. Whit getting off a thigh-slapper over a song of the day was about as likely as Rudy Vallee making a joke about Herefords. But Whit himself would have been the first to say he was an improved person since the North Fork was offered up. For his part, Wes had stuffed the lease papers into his attache case before they left the ranch as if the document was any other transaction. Which, pretend to himself as he was trying, it in no way could ever be. He still was working on tomorrow, when the two of them were to meet with Susan in the morning and signatures were to go onto dotted lines. When they pulled up in front of the theater he had glimpsed her for a moment there in the lobby and knew he would be aware of her during every note of Monty's performance and it still seemed beyond reckoning, that a bumpy encounter in France had led all the way to this. And Monty at the heart of it. In

tribute to that he started into the theater, but Whit rerouted him with a shoo of the hand.

“Let’s hold on out here a minute--we’re in for more culture than I can usually sit through. Condemned man always is given a chance to roll a last one, doesn’t he?” He pulled a tobacco pouch and pack of rolling papers out of the pocket of his evening wear, did a judicious sprinkle and licked together a cigarette. While Wes withdrew into his thoughts, which he never seemed to want company on, Whit let out a silent whistle of smoke as he studied the theater placard studded with the most glowing phrases from the review in the *New York World*. Half the newspapers in Montana had picked up that review. He shook his head at having had so famous a choreboy. “Do it all over again, would you?”

Wes chose to misunderstand. “What, every particle of my life?

“How about one or two of the main chunks here lately?” Whit invited.

“What’s turned you philosophical?”

“Ahh, who knows. Told you it’s funny weather.” Whit tossed down the runty stub of his cigarette and demolished it under his patent leather shoe. “All right, let’s go get music in our ears. Here’s hoping his Montana debut turns out better than his mother’s.”

memory, where his mother lifts from her laundress chores and prepares herself to sing at the statehood celebration, in a yesterday that never came, three dozen years ago. He grinned at the personage in the looking-glass as if catching up with him after all this time.

Exultant, he went on out to the back of the stage and around to the wing and the stage manager's roost. He still didn't care much for the feel of backstage, it amounted to about the same as the chute area in a rodeo: you hoped nobody did anything back here that would have untoward consequences to you out front. But he thought again about how Susan loved every guy rope, dust mote, and gizmo trunk of it, and could have kicked himself for not working it out to invite her to watch from the wings tonight; could have asked the Gustafsons and she'd have been included as if attached to them, that would have been the way. *Can't get it all right all the time.*

Within whispering range of the stage manager, J.J. was at his usual perch on a high stool too big for him, like a natty flagpole sitter. A figure planted in the shadows beyond J.J. and the stage manager and a couple of stagehands was as unmoving as a costume mannequin, but the set of its hat identified it as Bailey.

Monty knew that one of the bruisers was stationed at the back door, and if all this didn't reassure J.J. and Cecil he didn't know what would.

"Good house tonight," J.J. recited to Monty as he always did, whatever the audience size.

Monty stepped out onto the curtained stage far enough to see that his music stand was on the mark where it ought to be, then made a beeline for the stage manager's peephole.

J.J. was not stretching it tonight; a sellout crowd, packed from the front row to some standees along the farthest wall. What seemed to be Clore Street intact filled one entire balcony. He spotted Susan beside the Gustafsons. A row behind and a few seats over, the Major and Whit Williamson in full evening wear, one slick and one mussed but otherwise drawn by the same hand.

"One minute," the stage manager called, nervously watching Cecil who was still fussing with his music sheets in the rack for them on the piano, moving them an inch one way and then the other, although Monty seriously doubted music racks differed very much from piano to piano. But as he always did, with seconds to spare Cecil sashayed over into the wing alongside the rest of them as if

the curtain could not rise without his elevating presence, the first bow of the evening deliciously his.

The accompanist sopped up applause somewhat overlong, Susan jabbed the comma in as if it was a thumb in Cecil's ribs, bobbing like one of those toy birds that dips its beak in a glass of water. But then Monty made his appearance, and the real applause started.

As he came out I saw that he had been right to resist my attempts to cure his walk--that cowboy saunter of his lets the audience know this is a person who has come an extreme way to reach this point. He handles himself notably in every other way that counts, too. It has been long years since I sang on the Marlow stage myself, but I thought I remembered its particularities, and Monty did me proud when he took his mark just where I had guessed. As if the stage belonged to him. As if he had inherited it from, say, Chaliapin.

The applause poured over him until he steeped his fingers in a gesture of thanks and readiness. He had decided against saying anything first, just hit them with the first song. Now he nodded ever so slightly to Cecil, who piously unclasped his fingers from his lap as if raveling out a prayer, and the piano music began with a parade-ground prance.

"When I was young blade in my prime--"

Monty with controlled power held the note on the last consonant, setting it up to chime with the even more resounding one in the next line--

"I dabbed my X on the Medicine Line."

As he hit that note, round and perfect, the chandelier above the crowd began to sway.

He froze, the cut-glass constellation in motion even more now. Cecil shot him a confused look, trying to decide whether to keep playing so Monty could pick the melody back up or wash the tune out and start over--and then his hands halted on the keys as if a message was coming up through them. The music stilled, the only sound now the gentle tinkling of the chandelier. Then a rumble, like thunder down in the ground.

The theater floor vibrated as if it were the deck of a steamship leaving the dock. Pell-mell, the crowd came to its feet and started piling toward the doors, not a stampede yet but definitely a clogged surge.

An earthquake gives a person a jolt in more ways than one. It causes your basic assumption of life, the ground on which you exist, to quiver. I had been through one before, the time I took Samuel to Yellowstone Park. But we were

outdoors there, the sway of the trees like fishing rods in truth rather interesting.

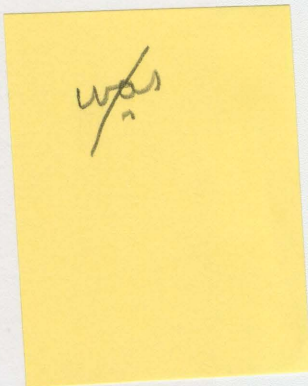
Here the question was whether the theater would shake to pieces with us in it. I

thought something already had fallen and bruised my arm when I realized it was

Mrs. Gus's grip on me.

Willing his bad leg to match his good one in the effort, Wes was up and clambering into the next aisle, fighting past eddying audience members to reach Susan and Mrs. Gustafson. He always hated pandemonium, he would rather take his chances in a shellhole. Now he banged over seats until he ^{was} within reach of Susan, a vexed expression on her that seemed to wonder why people needed to be so contrary, as she tried to make her way toward the stage. His instinct supported that: "The stage steps! Out that way!" No sooner did he have Susan and Mrs. Gustafson plunging that direction with him than the Marlow Theater gave another shudder and the lights went out. In the sudden interior dusk, plaster dust making them all cough, he muscled a path for the women to follow him. Whit and Gustafson, each puffing harder than the other, caught up with them.

At the first ripple of motion under the stage Monty had bolted for the shelter of the nearest wall, in case the roof was coming down. He hung on there, peering out into the spilling aisles of the theater, in spite of Bailey tugging at him



and J.J. and Cecil shouting at him from the backstage door. When Susan and the rest of the group came stumbling up the steps in the dimness he grabbed her by her free arm, and between them he and Wes, and Bailey somewhere in there too, half-shielded and half-levitated her in a crablike scramble.

It is the nearest I will experience to traveling by sedan chair. Behind me Mrs. Gus was similarly scooped up by Whit and Gus and the bruiser.

A chunk of plaster the size of a garage door fell and shattered on the stage. They heard a rain of glass as windows rattled to pieces. As they ran the obstacle course of backstage, the building seemed to think it over, whether to settle back from its restlessness or curtsy to the mastering earth.

We came out in the sidestreet. The quake seemed to have shaken the clock mechanism of the universe, it had been only few minutes yet it was as if we had passed through some entire season of life.

J.J. and Cecil were there to lend a hand when they flooded out the door. The rumbling and shaking quit as abruptly as it had started and that was disorienting too, not knowing when the earth's case of the quivers might start up again. They clambered in a group away from the back of the theater, Wes counting heads as they skittered out into the sidestreet like a handful of dropped

marbles. He halted everybody when they were safely out of range of walls that might crumble. Dazed, they peered around as if surprised that the moon still hung in place, that there was the same air to breathe as before the thundershake of the earth. Except for the population out in its streets, most of whom would spend the night in their cars, downtown Helena at the intersection a block away from them appeared remarkably unchanged. "Gus, if the car is in one piece, bring it around here, quick," Wes directed. Bailey said the same to his man, then sprinted up to the corner to see if the streets were passable out of the Gulch.

No one else moved much, as though the surface under them was delicate. Susan had taken to gripping Mrs. Gustafson's considerable bicep reassuringly rather than have that muscle applied to Mrs. Gustafson's gripping of her. All the while, the only sound besides everybody's tentative breathing was Mrs. Gustafson softly moaning in a hiccuping way. The cluster of them stood waiting there, dressed like aristocratic refugees amid the tipped ashcans and broken windowglass. The night was staying warm. "Earthquake weather," Whit accused, from his California upbringing. "Damn it, I knew it was up to no good."

Monty numbly stared around at the city pocketed now in the moonlit mountainscape. *What does it take*, the thought came at him from every direction, *a million tries?* Rodeo getup or tuxedo, this place was determined to leave him in the dirt. Two more shakes and every one of them would have been buried in bricks, all because he had been determined to put the postponed anthems of his family into the air here.

Watching the look on Monty with apprehension, J.J. cursed under his breath. He edged up to Susan and whispered, "Can you do anything with him?"

No longer holding back, she was at his side in an instant. "Monty, you can't let this get you down," she heard herself saying, something they both knew the words to. She rummaged desperately for anything that might count as consolation. "Caruso was in San Francisco in that earthquake, and he went on to--"

"I'm no kind of a Ca--"

Just then the Deusenberg nosed into sight, Bailey riding its runningboard. He jumped off before the car drew to a complete halt.

"The *Herald* man has been on the line to his office," he reported. "Most of this was around Three Forks, Sixteenmile Canyon, in through there. Streets